The Good Fight

Continued from Page 6

Grigsby City that, perhaps no one cared. A little painting and paper-hanging, patronage of the few who ignored the partisan lines which religion and politics had set in Grigsby City, or a chance job from newcomers who had not learned the town's prejudices, engaged his brush. But Old Jimmy was seldom busy, and for the greater part of his idle days he hung like a starved dog awaiting a bone on the edge of the crowd at Vickers'. Curiously enough, the political discussions that waged there never seemed to arouse his interest. He was equally listless in the face of religious controversy. But when they talked of Shiloh or Chickamauga, or Gettysburg, his faded eyes gleamed, a pink flush came into his weather-beaten cheeks, and he stood erect beside the counter against which at other times he lounged apathetically.

It was the October the Twentieth Kansas came home from the Philippines that Old Jimmy declared himself. The Twentieth, sweeping eastward accompanied by a full corps of newspaper correspondents, had crossed the western border of the state. From every station the correspondents were wiring the details of its movements. Grigsby City, although far removed from the line of march, was in full regalia. From every doorway a flag hung. Laban Cain, who because of a certain intimate association with sign painting in his youth had achieved expertness in color effects, had swathed the Cain Hotel in a warm, almost tropical expression of his art. In Grigsby City they claim to this day that Laban's exhibit of bunting was the finest ever made between Chicago and Denver. At the Roost, Lemuel Vickers read the report of the Twentieth's progress aloud from the morning paper while the Old Boys, stirred by the spirit of '61, recalled that other home-coming of the long ago.

Lemuel read the last press dispatch, which was dated at Dodge City, and, removing his glasses, began leisurely to wipe them. Old Jimmy, as was his wont, slouched against the notion case just outside the circle of veterans, into which he had never by any chance obtruded himself. He had not spoken and the habitues of the Roost had, beyond bidding him the time of day, given no sign that they were aware of his presence.

"Well," said Judson Follansbee, "us old coffee-coolers know how the boys feels."

"Yes," said Pliny Tate, whose old wound still bothered him and who, after a sleepless night was apt to be peevish and irascible, "We've all been there, that is all of us except Old Jimmy. I reckon Jimmy couldn't stand the smell of gunpowder."

"I mind when I come home from Seven Pines—"

But Israel Giddings got no farther. Upon the circle of veterans there was suddenly borne the consciousness that a soul writhed in agony upon its cross. Instinctively every eye turned to Old Jimmy. He was standing erect beside the counter, his articulation choked, such words as came from him falling incoherently from his quivering lips. Finally he found voice, strained and unnatural though it was.

"'Taint right, 'taint fair!" he screamed. "I wan't no coward. I wanted to go; God, how I wanted to go! But somebody jest had to stay with mother. She hadn't turned herse'f in bed for twenty years and she wouldn't let anybody tech her but me. I just couldn't leave her. And when John and Ike went I thought maybe that justified me in stayin' at home. And then they brought John home from Shiloh in a box and his widder and children come home to live with us—five mouths to feed and nothin' scarcely to put in 'em. When Ike follered him back from Vicksburg with his right arm all shattered to pieces I give it up, fer they all had to be fed and there wan't nobody to do nothin' but me! I wan't no coward and wan't no traitor to the old flag"—and here Old Jimmy's voice broke again and turning with such dignity as a weary, beaten man can muster, he stalked out of the room on his unutterably lonely and desolate way to the bare cottage he called home.

"God!" said Colonel Lipe, as the door swung behind his retreating figure, and then he added. "We've been too hard on Old Jimmy."

Thad Jenkins, seeking Old Jimmy and intent upon his services for some puttering job about his place, found him, the next afternoon, stretched upon his bed, stricken and flighty. A fever scorched his veins, his mind had bridged the forty years that lay immediately behind him, and he babbled incoherently of things beyond Jenkins' ken. "Doc" Handy, who came down in an hour or two in response to Jenkins' call, stopped on his return to talk to Mrs. Tug Watts, who noting his visit to Uncle Jimmy's place had run out to inquire the cause. "He'll never get up," said Doc. "His machine has run down and no doctor can wind it up."

Now Grigsby City ever buries its petty prejudices, its partisan convictions and its controversial unkindliness when it approaches the bedside of suffering, or crosses the pathway of sorrow. The last sands of Old Jimmy's life ran out to the accompaniment of such care and comfort as willing, solicitous hands could bestow. They buried him from his cottage, and while it was not deemed appropriate that any minister should lend himself to the service, the Old Judge, Grigsby City's most prominent veteran, spoke briefly and a long procession followed the body to the cemetery on the hill. And so, and in such manner, the earth closed over the tired body and the scarred heart forever.

It was a year or two later that George Travis came back from the city to spend Decoration Day with his mother in the old town. That afternoon he walked about the cemetery, noting with the indifference of youth the fresh mounds, and pausing now and then to read the lines graven upon the memorials to the dead raised since he had last set foot within the inclosure. Upon one mound marked by a granite boulder a deluge of flowers had fallen. Loving hands had drawn a mantle of roses, peonies and lilies over it. He drew nearer and upon the stone read this inscription:

IN MEMORY OF
JAMES MARRS
b. 1835; d. 1899.
Erected by Abe Lincoln Post
No. 204, G. A. R.
"He Fought the Good Fight."